

## **Dôjô 道場 – the meaning of the word and its implications**

*Dôjô* literally means the place (jô 場, Japanese reading: *ba*) of the way (道 *dô*, Japanese reading: *michi*), the place where the “way” (e.g. a martial art) is practiced.

### **Three definitions**

*Dôjô* has three distinct, but inter-related meanings:

1. Originally it was the translation of the Sanskrit term *bodhimanda*. This indicates the spot under the tree, where the historical Buddha Shakyamuni experienced his awakening (*bodhi*). The *manda* (= *dôjô*) is therefore the place, where the “essence” of enlightenment is present.
2. In Zen-temples it denotes the hall or room, where sitting meditation (*zazen*) is practiced. In a broader sense it signifies every site, where one follows the “way of the Buddha” (*butsudô* 仏道), e. g. temples or assembly rooms for buddhist practices.
3. For the Karateka the *dôjô* is the place, where he hones his skills in his martial art (*budô* 武道). In this sense it became widely used only since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It actually is the abbreviation of *budôjô* 武道場, which was besides *keikoba* 稽古場 (training place) the common denomination until then.

### ***Dô* as a “way” of cultural practices**

A *dôjô* can be a separate building or a temporary space used for engaging in some martial art. The “*dô*” (道 *dao* in Chinese) in “*dôjô*” has an extensive philosophical meaning in Daoism as the ultimate essence or natural order of the universe. In Japan it also denotes a “way of life” in the sense

of being dedicated to an art, craft or study. Since the Edo-period (1603-1868) it was used to denote traditional “ways” like *chadô/sadô* 茶道 (tea ceremony), *shodô* 書道 (calligraphy) *kadô* 華道 (flower arranging), *kyûdô* 弓道 (archery), *jûdô* 柔道 (the “gentle way” of grappling and throwing), *kendô* 剣道 (swordsmanship) etc. In the latter cases it replaced “*jutsu*” 術 (“technical skill, method”) as in *jûjutsu* 柔術 or *kenjutsu* 剣術. The implication was that these martial arts were meant not only for refining physical or technical skills, but also for mental and spiritual training and development. A clear distinction has been drawn between *bujutsu* 武術 (classical martial arts of self-protection) and *budô* 武道 (classical martial ways of self-perfection).

### **From Karate-*jutsu* to Karate-*dô***

Funakoshi Gichin still used the term *Karate-jutsu* in the title of his second book published in 1925. *Karate-jutsu* was then streamlined along the concept of “*dô*” and appropriated by the Japanese on the main island as a form of “*budô*”, thus renamed “*Karate-dô*”. Hence the place, where Karate is exercised also became the *dôjô*. In the Japanese understanding a *dôjô* is not just a sports facility, but a space where body, mind and spirit are trained in unison. It is a place to strive for self-perfection. Therefore when entering and leaving a *dôjô*, one should make a bow as a sign of respect.

### **(Zen-)Buddhist meaning**

The Mahâyâna-buddhist scripture titled *Vimalakîrti-sûtra* (Jap. 維摩經 *Yuimakyô*) is highly appreciated and widely read in Zen-circles. Its protagonist *Vimalakîrti* is a lay practitioner and householder, who teaches the doctrines of nothingness and non-duality and silence as an adequate expression thereof. He serves as an example for someone,

who attained the highest buddhist wisdom whilst leading an “ordinary” life. One line out of the Vimalakîrti sūtra is often quoted by martial artists, and it recurs to meaning 1 of *dôjô*: *Jikishin kore dôjô* 直心是道場. Verbally this means: “Where the mind is straight, there is the *dôjô*.” Thurman translates it as: “The seat of enlightenment is the seat of positive thought because it is without artificiality.” (Thurman 1976:36). The “seat of enlightenment” is translated into Japanese as “*dôjô*”. In a broader meaning it can be interpreted as: the *dôjô* is everywhere, where an activity is pursued with total dedication and mindfulness.

The Zen monk Genyû Sôkyû states: “In the end everything in Zen is about everyday life.” (Genyû 2003:153) He illustrates this with some famous Zen-sayings. The most salient among them might be: “Meditation in the midst of activity is infinitely superior to meditation in stillness.” 動中の工夫、静中に勝ること百千億倍 *Dôchû no kufû, jôchû ni masaru koto hyakusenokubai*. (Genyû 2003:153) This was actually a bold calligraphy brushed by the eminent Zen-monk Hakuin (1686-1768) three days before his passing. The *chû* (“midst”, Japanese reading: *naka* 中) is emphasized by thick strokes and by prolongation of the line in the middle of the character (Stevens 1999:100).

### **All life is a *dôjô***

Every Japanese “*dô*” is inspired by Zen and infused with Zen-idea(l)s, exactly because according to these every activity can be transformed into a meditative act or spiritual exercise. In this spirit the 8<sup>th</sup> principle in the *Shôtôkan nijû-kun*, *The 20 Guiding Principles of Shotokan*, by Funakoshi Gichin can be understood: 道場のみの空手と思うな. *Dôjô nomi no Karate to omou na!* Do not think that Karate training is only in the *dôjô*. The acute mind nurtured in the *dôjô* should be shown in everyday life. Good practice in the *dôjô* will have good effects in our daily life and undertakings

other than Karate. Many a Karateka will attest to the fact, that Karate-training had/has positive consequences for their lives. The whole life can be a *dôjô*!

#### References:

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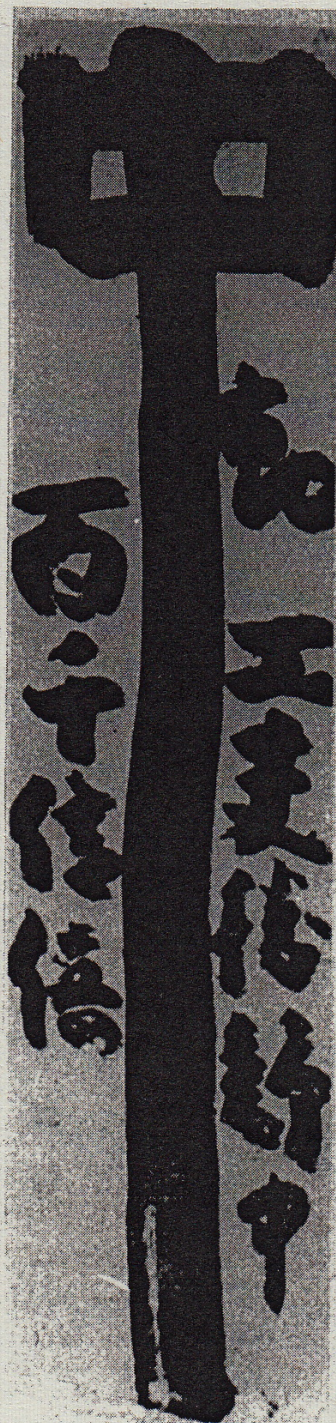
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*Hakuin's Motto: "Meditation in the MIDST of activity is a billion times superior to meditation in stillness!" (Tanaka Collection, Japan)*